

**Partnership Fund event 16 March 2010
Feedback from Workshop 2**

Question 1: What does a model social partnership look like in the NHS?

From previous workshops, research and feedback nationally, regionally and locally SPF have identified a number of areas which partners should consider when setting up, delivering and improving successful partnerships. These were also the areas we asked partners at the event to consider when asking "What does good look like?"

The experiences and feedback from the groups at the event followed a number of key themes:

Effective communications

All delegates agreed that effective two way communications were key to all aspects of working in partnership. Whether this is between partners, with key stakeholders or with staff the delegates offered the following suggestions for delivering effective communications.

- Communicate – early and effectively
- Ensure a robust 2-way communication strategy is in place
- Clear communication to all that is monitored to ensure everyone gets it
- Consult before making a decision so that staff have an impact on the decision making process
- Advertise, advertise, advertise
- Have/consider re-branding – badge, name and communicate the branding so staff know and can identify
- Consider resource for staff side to communicate

Practical ways of communicating include:

- Option based consultation – early involvement and generating ideas
- Hold staff engagement sessions and events open to everyone
- Communication from chief executive – attend department meetings by video conference
- Face to face briefing sessions – teams, departmental – nothing beats face to face briefing - this could be done in partnership
- Intranet page/web-site
- Social networking (staff specific available at home)
- Induction
- Q&A sessions with managers and staff side

Considerations for content of communications suggested were:

- Ensure that staff, reps and management are informed of bigger picture, key issues, priorities

- Improve communications (line managers) lack of jargon, terminology needs to be right
- Demonstrate you listen to people
- 'snappy' strap lines to attract attendance/buy in
- Describe the outcome – short terms – what will it look like along the journey?
- A joint partnership message is strong/Joint signatures on shared documents

Resources

All partnerships need to be adequately resourced in order to deliver their agenda. The key issue facing most partnerships in terms of resources is time to engage in strategic planning and delivery. This is an issue for employers, managers and staff side representatives. Suggestions for meeting this challenge include:

- Planning dedicated resources - however size matters therefore investment and partnership should be applied accordingly to organisation size
- Adequate capacity for staff representatives to engage – ensure engagement up front, this could be helped through:
 - review of flexibility in time off arrangements during peaks in activity e.g. organisational change
 - Mutual understanding between managers and staff side of the expectations of time implications of being a TU rep
- Designated director with strong leadership skills and adequate administrative support

Behaviours and culture

Behaviours and culture needed to support and deliver partnership working are:

- Trust and openness - gain trust by maintaining confidentiality
- Culture which supports staff engagement and releases time especially at middle manager level
- Leadership style – enlightened management policies
- No surprises
- No blame
- Mutual respect even if views differ
- Listen

In order to achieve these behaviours and embed this culture:

- Emulate partnership at all levels in the organisation 'practice what you preach'/Leading by example
- Don't let the past cloud future partnership working
- Behaviour and values of representatives and managers should be explicit, adopted and need to underpin any framework. 'niggles' should be out on the table and discussed
- Reward e.g. at board those behaviours not just achievement of targets/savings.
- Training and development of behaviour that supports partnership for managers
- Acceptance of staff side and management roles – avoid preconceptions
- Take time to build relationships and trust
- Robust and well established champions
- Of greater importance is commitment by all to support.

Processes and organisation

In order to run an effective forum which maximises the resources available, engages the right people and delivers a strategic agenda which adds real value to the organisation it is important to have clear processes in place. Local partners recommend:

- Proper planning and preparation
- Actions developed and implemented jointly
- Earliest possible involvement in decision making process (build trust demonstrated by confidential discussions)
- Forum/focus groups – to ensure the right people are engaged in the right thing at the right time
- Include delivery and behaviours in performance management metrics – accountability at all levels
- Make sure its convenient to come (avoid exclusion) - Meetings should reflect 24/7 working
- Effective agendas - Agree hot topics that are relevant
- Make links between staff side and board/management
- Using staff side representatives to facilitate ideas/concerns
- Regular reviews, audit and feedback
- Feedback (audit) mechanisms
- Make agreements available
- Consistency of membership
- Overall steering group with project leads for each area and deadlines timescales
- Accountability with clear objectives and activity plans. Clear tangible mutually agreed goals
- Skill set matches requirement of the job
- Formalised agreements are required to protect arrangements and ensure continuity

Clear vision

All groups agreed that a clear vision about what the partnership is and does is key to successful partnership working. Specific points to consider are:

- Define 'partnership' and show you are listening
- Partnership analysis what do they want and how to get it
- Define the purpose
- Clear understanding of strategic aim
- A framework that all staff understand and are involved in
- Identify the outcome – e.g. staff survey – buy in to improvements
- Be realistic and manage people's expectations from the start
- In partnership – terms of reference(i.e. facilities agreement)
- Integrated in constitution
- Agenda is driven in partnership with clear terms of reference
- Clear goals and action plans with feedback mechanism
- Terms of reference
- Specific policy/agreement
- Embed this in vision and values
- Take opportunity to review purpose of negotiating groups to embed the characteristics to embrace and support

Membership, skills and accountability

Ensuring that the right people are involved in the partnership with the skills and commitment to make it work was something that the local partners agreed was essential. In order to make this happen the local partners suggested:

- Leadership and educating of managers
- Asking the right people to come
- Ensuring leadership buy-in e.g. chief executive diary not to be altered
- Recognising unions
- Commitment at senior level
- Strong union/senior management representation
- Varied membership at middle manager level (core body executive team)
- Attendees who can make decisions
- Aimed at cross section of organisation whether union or non union members
- Provide people with feedback of their attendance – thank people personally and stress the importance of the forum
- Balance membership to include senior decision makers and middle managers to give different perspectives
- Demonstration of commitment, e.g. from chief executive
- Right senior management as well as staff side
- Level playing field – value contributions
- Depends on subject matter and agenda
- Representatives need to be supported to understand the needs of the business to allow robust challenges to be made
- Representatives need to be supported, developed and coached to manage the potential conflict of being involved in a 'significant' decision at strategic level
- One single partnership group to encompass all professional bodies in consultation and negotiation
- Need to increase the knowledge of managers into the roles and the demands of trade union representatives. Also need to link to the benefits of partnership working
- Need to ensure that there is development of representatives at a national level to be able to fulfil what we feel is the changing role of the rep e.g. business knowledge

Delivering

We do not work in partnership for partnerships sake but because we see the way that it can deliver real benefits:

- Be productive – do what you say you're going to do
- Do what you agreed to do/ Do what you say you're going to do
- Show that partnership works
- Sometimes need a good example/vehicle to demonstrate the benefits of partnership working e.g. job evaluation but need to be sustainable

Joint strategic agenda setting

In order to set the agenda together and ensure it is strategic partners suggest:

- Short term and long term projects – embedded in organisation
- Management willing to offer agenda items (not forced)
- Register interest at beginning of process – appropriate feedback to group
- Key people to agree in advance
- Partnership discussion
- Prioritising actions

- Terms of reference
- Structure in place for anyone to get their issue on the agenda
- Pre-agreed agendas that have been circulated to all members of staff side and management beforehand
- Staff side and management meetings to include strategic agendas as well as operational issues
- Pre-prep agenda items – sharing protocol
- Structured approach
- Communicate process
- Open dialogue to set the agenda
- Mechanism for staff side or management to identify issues in between meetings
- Need to agree jointly in advance of the meeting – dedicated time per month to do this need to strike a balance between strategic and operational

Improvement and review

Ensuring that partnerships are relevant and fit for purpose is essential for long term success, suggestions for achieving this included:

- Regular timely review (annual review part of remit of reference)
- Ensure if attendance drops hold day events/recruitment of representatives
- Engagement with external staff associations
- Regular review of constitution
- Talk about it/listen to concerns
- Check terms of reference
- Review at end of joint meetings
- Partnership – workshop for managers
- Developing the train the trainer programme with competency skills framework
- 6-8 weeks half day director/management focus groups - informal
- Independent ACAS review
- Review membership
- Continuous review and feedback
- Use staff and patient surveys
- Link to national and regional group and forums
- Link to appropriate board meetings and committees
- Training for reps and managers
- Maintaining trust
- Outcome focused – smart measurable objectives
- Follow through items to a conclusion – see results

Question 2: What would be your overall top tip for working in partnership?

We asked the local partners to share their top tips for working in partnership and they said:

- Employee engagement
- Full time staff side post. Committing resources to partnership working
- Trust and transparency 'eliminating the fear factor'
- Communication, commitment and respect
- Define the vision – aim towards common goal
- Keep at it!
- Good communication

- Honesty and trust – patience
- Respect manager and staff's rights and roles
- Legitimate interests are recognised
- Put openness and honesty into practice
- Openness and transparency and mutual respect
- Confidence to challenge negative behaviours
- Walk the walk not talk the talk. Listen and consult meaningfully
- Commitment and tenacity – don't give up!